



TOWNSHEND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

N E W S L E T T E R

Spring/Summer 2023

P. O. Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353



Wilson Tin Shop, version #1

The Little Tin Shop

“Over a century and a half, one of the unusual buildings in Townshend village was the Little Tin Shop, located immediately north of the Baptist Church on present-day Route 35. It was also one of the village’s most versatile structures, serving successively at least ten different functions. The shop, only about 15 feet wide by 25 feet deep, was built in 1838 as a law office. During 1864-84 it housed a shop that fabricated tinware (containers, utensils, and the like). Later it became a drugstore, storehouse, and residence. The Little Tin Shop barely survived the 1894 fire that destroyed the next-door Baptist Church. After the fire it was in use as a dwelling, and as the Townshend post office. After the turn of the twentieth century, the building was used as a millinery shop, and in 1904-5 it became a dormitory for Leland and Gray students. Over the next decades the shop was a meat market, stove store, post office (again), and hardware storehouse” (*Stitch in Time* p190). It was at last torn down around 1969 when the new high school was built.

We have discovered through various photos that the tin shop has had two different versions. While the footprint is similar and the gable end of the shop faces the street in both renditions, we observe that the first structure had a shorter depth and had its door at the right with a large window to the left. The second building had a center doorway with a window at each

side. This version is possibly 10 feet longer than the first and the elevation seems to be 3-4 feet higher.

According to an advertisement for Wilson and Wiswell’s Tin Shop, they were manufacturers and dealers in the following items: tin ware, copper, and sheet iron ware; stoves, hollow ware, pumps, lead pipe, etc. “All jobbing promptly attended to; especial attention paid to Sugaring Material.”

Considering the size of some of these items, we speculate that Mr. Wilson’s barn, next door, might have been used for manufacturing, storage, and repair work.



Wilson house with Tin Shop, version #2, at the right

Near the former tin shop site, a third incarnation is planned by Nan Stefanik as a home for Vermont Quince and as “a gift shop featuring local artisans, growers, and food producers.” Nan is considering various ways to include some architectural features reminiscent of the old tin shop.



Andrew (1837-1887) and wife, Judith (Smith) Wilson



The Brigham section of the cemetery

The Brigham-Bixby Cemetery

The Brigham-Bixby Cemetery was sometimes called the “Holland Cemetery” due to its proximity to the old Holland farm and covered bridge; however, there are no Hollands buried here and it should be noted that there is a “Holland Cemetery” a little further south on Route 30 in Newfane.

Surrounded by private land presently owned by the Darren Vangel family, this cemetery is in the woods overlooking the West River, off the State Forest Road. To the best of our knowledge, there are no deeds referencing the cemetery.

One part of the cemetery has a fence around it, and the other does not. There are about 40 carved and uncarved markers, and the earliest carved stone dates to 1800 for Lt. Tilley Wilder, one of three veterans in the cemetery. The military outfit in which Lt. Wilder served is unknown.

When the Cemetery Commission took over the care, it was overgrown, with a number of gravestones on the ground. Having obtained the former owner’s permission in 1975, brush was cut and all the stones were fixed; the cemetery has been maintained by the Townshend Cemetery Commission ever since.

Recently, Mrs. Nancy Tracey contacted us about some relatives buried there, and gave us lists of who was related to the Hollands. Funds were also donated by her family for some repairs; the remaining funds are being held for future needs of the cemetery.

--Charlie Marchant



The Bela Brigham Family in 1901

The Brigham-Bixby Cemetery, mentioned in the previous article, includes a stone for Orpha Hazelton Brigham (above left) who died in 1839, leaving her son, Bela Brigham an orphan. Next to Orpha is a stone for Clarinda Brigham (above right) who was a “famous school teacher of 24 years at Leland and Gray” and who also gave her younger brother, Bela Brigham, a good education. We have the following information about Bela Brigham from *Picturesque Townshend*, 1901.

Bela B. Brigham (1831-1910) and his wife Mary (Holbrook) Brigham, were “descended from Townshend’s earliest pioneers.” Bela’s grandfather was Ebenezer Brigham (1761-1839), who came to Townshend in 1782 and was a farmer and a distiller.



The Ebenezer Brigham farm where Bela lived 1831-1885

In 1856 Bela married Mary E. Holbrook, and they farmed in the Riverdale area for 30 years, after which time they sold to Joab Holland. Bela and family then moved in 1885 to the historic Jessurm Walker farm (near the Holbrook farm on Grafton Road) where they did mixed farming on 150 acres and had a good flock of sheep. He died in 1910 and she in 1919; they are both buried in the Oakwood Cemetery. The Brighams are remembered for their generous support of education, both for their own children, and also by donations to Leland and Gray Seminary.

--Research by Heidi Clawson



Hugh Holden barns c 2014 Photo by Stephanie Garrow



Milking Time at the Holden Farm, 1953
Milton, Jr; John; and Richard Holden

The Value of Vermont Barns

“The Vermont barn—photogenic, full of character –is an endangered species.” There are about 150 barns (large and small; new and old) in Townshend, VT; each year several are lost to fire, collapse, or bulldozers. Barns are irreplaceable assets that “linger as vulnerable survivors of the past. Yet before these buildings vanish, each has a story to tell” (Thomas Visser, *Field Guide to New England Barns & Farm Buildings*, pub 1997).

“Though we are tempted to romanticize traditional Vermont, it important to remember that it had its dignity, its darkness, and its own worth. It was based not on nostalgia or sentiment, but on work, the real fundamentalism of the time.

“Many of the traditional values of that earlier Vermont –a respect for hard work, a love of independence and of doing for oneself, a closeness to nature, a care for one’s community –still exist today, even though the living culture that shaped those values is now all but gone. The memories of traditional Vermont are passing gradually, as the people who knew and lived in that Vermont die. Yet it can be glimpsed from time to time and still colors the ways Vermonters think about themselves” (Tom Slayton, Foreword, *Up in the Morning Early* by Scott Hastings, Jr. and Elsie R. Hastings, 1992).

Barns are an important resource for understanding the history of Vermont and its agriculture. In addition, they are vital to maintaining our picturesque landscape that will continue to draw visitors –which in turn is great for our economy, both now and in future years.

You might like to check out our self-guided Barn Tour at www.townshendvt.org and click on the Historic Sites tab. Regrettably, within two years of our creating this tour, three barns had already gone.

--Research by Heidi Clawson

A Walk Through Time

The self-guided tour project for our village houses is making progress. People interested in researching one or more of the 44 houses around the Common are invited to join us. Any photos you might have could be scanned and returned to the owner. We’re especially interested in photos of buildings no longer extant, such as the Tin Shop, the Carlton Smith house, the John Schnebly house, and the lawyer’s office.

If interested in participating in this project, please contact a board member or call Charlie Marchant at 802-365-7937.



Townshend Historical Society Board

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West Townshend Stone Arch Bridge c 1910



P.O. Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353

Restoration of the West Townshend Stone Arch Bridge Moves Forward

Spurred on by the continued strong support of the voters of Townshend, who approved another \$50,000 for the Town’s Stone Arch Bridge Reserve at March Town Meeting, the West Townshend Stone Arch Bridge Restoration Project is slated to start in Spring 2024 and be completed by the Fall.

Townshend Historical Society is grateful for the outpouring of support from townspeople who have committed a total of \$288,000 for the project over the past five years. That sum, added to the Save America’s Treasures grant of \$221,000 awarded to Townshend Historical Society plus gifts and anticipated pledges, has brought us within reach of the projected budget of \$800,000.

Project representatives from the Town, the Historical Society, and James Duggan, Director of Preservation for Vermont Historic Sites, have been working closely to create a Request for Proposal (RFP) intended to procure the Certified Dry Stone Mason to lead the project. Bidders must hold a current DSWA (GB) Master Craftsman Certification.

We expect that by the time you receive this newsletter, the Request for Proposal will have been released to the general public. To request a copy of the RFP, please contact Connie Holt, Assistant to the Townshend Select Board at cholt@townshendvt.gov.

--Lee Petty



Winifred Follett, widow of John Follett, donating family items at THS in April, 2023

We are grateful to Winifred Follett for the donation of a Follett Family History album, a box of early photos, and other interesting historic items. John Follett, Winifred’s husband, was the last remaining male bearing the family name in the line of the stone-arch-bridgebuilder, James Otis Follett.

Please Join

Membership year runs January to December.

Dues are \$10 Single; \$15 Family
(Additional donations gratefully accepted.)

Please mail your dues to
THS, PO Box 202, Townshend, VT 05353
or pay on-line at www.townshendvt.org

Save a tree: Request an email newsletter.